



## P L A N N I N G

Town of Blacksburg  
C O M M I S S I O N

To: Montgomery County Planning Commission

From: Town of Blacksburg Planning Commission

Date: October 2, 2007

Subject: *Refer 07-0005* Montgomery County Referral: Brush Mountain Estates Rezoning from A-1, Agriculture to R-R, Rural Residential of 132 Acres for a 41 lot subdivision.

Mr. Chairman:

The Blacksburg Planning Commission appreciates the opportunity to review the above referenced referral as this property is adjacent to the town and is in the extraterritorial area of Blacksburg, as defined by the town's Comprehensive Plan.

*Blacksburg 2046*, the Town's Comprehensive Plan was reviewed for guidance on this proposed development. The Government Relations Chapter, 2046 Vision for the Extraterritorial Area of the plan establishes identifying characteristics to be considered for this area adjacent to the corporate boundary.

As this chapter was developed with mutual cooperation between the Town and County Planning Commissions, the statements below are relevant and pertinent to this application:

*To the north of Town, the slope of Brush Mountain is forested and contains very residential large-lot properties with conservation easements. The appearance of the mountain face is natural, and there is little ridgeline development or significant clearing that would indicate disruption of the scenic viewscape. Greenways, bikeways, hiking and equestrian trails wind from the Town up the slope into the National Forest, connecting to Pandapas Pond. These connections are open to the public and have been developed in a low-impact manner that is not apparent from the various views of the mountain*

Extraterritorial Area Identifying Characteristics pertinent to this proposal include:

***Extraterritorial Areas watersheds include the Roanoke River, James River, New River, and groundwater aquifers.*** A distinguishing feature of the area is the Eastern Continental Divide, which separates watersheds that drain into the Atlantic Ocean from those that drain to the Gulf of Mexico. The Roanoke River is the main Atlantic drainage waterway in this area, and the New River is the large Gulf drainage. Craig Creek, a small tributary of the James River (Chesapeake Bay-Atlantic drainage) lies north of Blacksburg in Montgomery County. The continental divide was an important feature to settlers headed west, and access across the divide is reflected in historic trails. The groundwater resources of Blacksburg are

influenced by land uses outside the Town boundary, and *vice versa*. Areas within and around Blacksburg contain karst terrain with uncharacterized flow regimes, having interconnections between ground and surface waters distinguished by easily impacted elements such as caves, sinkholes, and springs. Bottom Creek in Montgomery and Roanoke Counties and Little Stony Creek in Giles County are protected by the state as exceptional state waters.

*The Town is nestled between largely undeveloped, wooded mountains, which provide scenic views from areas in Town.* Brush Mountain is located to the north and west, Paris Mountain to the east, and Price Mountain to the south. These mountains provide a visual boundary and a community identity to Blacksburg. *Suburbanization of mountain slopes and ridgelines threatens these natural and scenic resources that are widely valued in the region as contributing significantly to the quality of life in the area.* Most of the mountain slopes facing Blacksburg are in private ownership and not protected with conservation easements. Further, the spectacular views afforded from points on these slopes make them attractive for housing development. In many cases the lack of well and septic sites, and the unavailability of public utilities, has limited development. In addition, poor road access has constrained development. While the designation of much of the County (including the western half of Price Mountain, the undeveloped portions of Brush Mountain, the North Fork Valley, Paris Mountain, and other features in the Blacksburg area) to Resource Stewardship has curtailed future development of large-scale subdivisions on mountain slopes; the eastern portion of Price Mountain is the exception and will likely to have the greatest visual impact on Blacksburg. The Town should work with the County and other organizations to protect the viewshed, which is currently zoned R-2 and is designated as “Residential Transition” in the County’s comprehensive plan. *Development on mountain slopes, if any, should be in a conservation pattern where either very large lots retain natural forest cover and the subsequent clearing of individual properties is severely limited; or in a planned development where building sites are carefully chosen to minimize clearing and grading and large portions of the property are permanently preserved in their natural state, with greenway and trail connections.*

*Water and sewer utility extensions and stormwater management throughout the area will contribute to development pressures on these mountainsides and on agricultural land.* There is a strong linkage between the provision of water and sewer services, stormwater management, efficient land use, and the delivery of other vital municipal services. Extension of utilities without a strong and detailed plan to control and direct growth will contribute to the elimination of agricultural uses and the loss of the unique rural and scenic character of the region.

Planning Sector Extraterritorial Area Identifying Characteristics pertinent to this proposal include:

**North End:** The North End Planning Sector is directly adjacent to the eastern Town border with Montgomery County. Across this border is a significant amount of undeveloped land in the County. Residents are concerned with potential land development impacts within and outside the Town around their neighborhoods. New developments should include proper buffers, trails, landscaping, and should be developed at a density suitable to the site and the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.

**Northwest:** Preservation of open space is a special consideration for any development in the Northwest sector along with protection of viewsheds of Brush Mountain. Ridgelines, hilltops, land identified in the Greenway Master Plan, and land adjacent to existing public parks, to existing preserved open space, or to the Creek Valley Overlay is of significant value to the community. It may be appropriate to consider an increase in density for the development of a parcel where land of significant value off-site will be preserved as open space. This special consideration may occur only if the land is determined to be of significant value to the community and the additional density does not compromise the integrity of the receiving site. Approximately three-quarters or more of the off-site parcel may be proffered as permanent open space

### **Conclusion**

The rezoning request of 132 acres from A-1 to R-R, Rural Residential for a 41 lot subdivision, Brush Mountain West Phase 10, is not consistent with *Blacksburg 2046* policies and goals. The proposed rezoning impacts the viewshed of ridgelines surrounding Blacksburg and could impact surrounding water quality and recreational areas within the Town. As the proposed subdivision is currently designed and based upon information submitted, there are potential emergency service response issues and traffic issues that have not been addressed.

The Town's Planning Commission recommends the County Planning Commission deny approval of this application. Again, thank you for the opportunity to review the application.

Sincerely,

Ms. Lesley Howard, Chair  
Town of Blacksburg Planning Commission